

Vicar's Letter #17: 11 September, 2020

Referendums on the End of Life Choice Act and Cannabis Legalisation and Control

Dear Parishioners

Our General Election will soon take place. On 17 October, and in advance of that date any time from 3 October, we will be able to vote. One of the Government's polling stations will be the St James' Church hall! This year, along with our electorate and party votes, we are asked to vote on two important referendums – the first relating to the End of Life Choice Act and the second relating to cannabis legalisation and control.

These two referendums are important issues for our country, and I urge you to inform yourselves on the relevant issues, form your own views in dialogue with the views of others, and exercise your right to vote. Christians, like other citizens of this country, are called to be well-informed and thoughtful, and to think through the issues of the day – whether they be the risks of spreading Covid-19, or the responsibility to vote wisely on these referendums.

Christians are sometimes accused of having unthinking dogmatic views about social issues, but as a blanket accusation this is quite unfair. Everyone starts from some fundamental beliefs and opinions about life as they form their opinions. Some, for example, might reason from the belief that there is no God, or that the most important social value is tolerance. Our views as Christians are formed by our thoughts and beliefs about God and human life and the purpose for which we have been created. If our faith in God and our relationship with God are fundamental to our lives, then our thinking will develop from those fundamentals. After all, we are charged by Jesus to love God with all our heart and soul and *mind* and strength (my emphasis), and to love our neighbour as ourselves (Mark 12:30-31). What position should we take on these referendums as an expression of love to God and to our “neighbours” in this country?

I will leave you with that question, and with some resources for your thinking, which I reviewed today. These resources were recently supplied to parish leaders by the Anglican Diocese of Wellington. They are helpful but not the last word on the topic, so please feel free to read more widely if you would like to.

The End of Life Choice Act

Our Archbishop, Philip Richardson, offered the following guidance on the issue of assisted dying in 2019, when the Act was still a Bill before Parliament: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=15s&v=YxXpHMb4feM> . This video is very thoughtfully expressed (21 minutes long).

Bishop Richard Randerson offers a PowerPoint presentation on the Act, which will be attached to the same email with which this Vicar letter has come. It is entitled: 01+PP+2020+End+of+Life+Choice.pptx . This is a useful overview and takes about 5 minutes to review.

An item by Rev Dr Graham O'Brien, Co-Chair of the InterChurch Bioethics Council, entitled “The End of Life Choice Act, Yes or No?” is provided here:

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e79091454d50902b3a0bf71/t/5f28c63bd1332b4db7aa064c/1596507708682/Article+GOB+EOLC+Full.pdf>

The same author provides answers to a list of frequently asked questions on this link:

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e79091454d50902b3a0bf71/t/5f28c699d1332b4db7aa13ee/1596507802900/ICBC+EOLC+Act+FAQs.pdf> . (Both these items take about 8-10 minutes to read and consider)

Views from the Yes for Compassion website advocating a Yes vote in the referendum are provided at the following link: <http://yesforcompassion.org.nz/> . There are several clear and articulate videos on this website from personal supporters of a Yes vote. They take around 25 minutes in total to view.

Government information about the Act can be found at:

<https://www.referendums.govt.nz/endoflifechoice/index.html>

Cannabis Legalisation and Control

Resources available on this item are as follows.

An item by Rev Dr Graham O'Brien, Co-Chair of the InterChurch Bioethics Council, entitled "Things to consider ahead of the Cannabis Referendum"

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e79091454d50902b3a0bf71/t/5f28c72aed094b12c58f159b/1596507948693/Cannabis+Referendum.pdf> This item takes around 8 minutes to read and consider.

An item from the NZ Drug Foundation supporting a yes vote on the referendum: <https://onourterms.org.nz/>
The written material is brief. A short video is also available on this link.

Government information about the referendum can be found at
<https://www.referendums.govt.nz/cannabis/summary.html>

Thank you for taking the time and effort to think about these two important referendums prior to voting.

With my prayers and warm greetings in Christ,

Peter Bengé

Vicar

(Anglican Parish of Lower Hutt)